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SUBJECT: BOLIVIAN SPY SCANDAL: CONTINUED EMBASSY ACCUSATIONS

Classified By: Acting EcoPol Chief Joe Relk for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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11. (U) Summary: In response to an unfolding domestic spy scandal the former National Intelligence Directorate (NDI) chief Jose Luis Centellas testified before a Senate Commission and stated that the Embassy "manages" many different intelligence groups and maintains records on all Bolivian citizens for the purpose of determining who qualifies for a U.S. visa. Centellas denied authorizing any domestic spying. Miguel Angel Rivera, the former commander of a USG funded police unit that Minister of Government Alfredo Rada has blamed for the domestic spying scandal, also testified before the Senate commission. Rivera confirmed that his unit received USG funding, but denied any domestic spying and refuted Rada's claims that his unit did not report its work within the police hierarchy.

12. (C) Rada also renewed and further developed his accusations that the Embassy is behind the domestic spying scandal. Rada criticized the embassy's use of surveillance detection units (SDU) and roving patrols, arguing they are unnecessary and calling them an affront to Bolivian sovereignty. (Comment: While Centellas' and Rada's charges are sensational and potentially damaging, we can rebut them and recover. Perhaps more damaging is the potential impact on our Embassy guard force. Rada may ratchet up pressure for guards to "report" on us. End Comment). End Summary.

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The USG Knows Everything
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13. (U) The former chief of the National Intelligence Directorate (NDI), Jose Luis Centellas, testified before the Senate's Constitutional Commission on February 20 that the Embassy "manages" many different intelligence groups and maintains records on all Bolivian citizens. Centellas argued the Embassy maintains files on Bolivians to assist in issuing visas for travel to the United States. Centellas stated, "There are many groups that the Embassy manages. . . They have a file on each and every one of us. They have our records . . . (to decide) whether or not to issue a visa."

Based on Centellas' testimony opposition Senator Luis Vasquez (PODEMOS, La Paz) stated he would request an explanation from the U.S. Embassy via the foreign ministry.

14. (U) In response to recent press reports that the police had engaged in domestic spying, Centellas denied ever ordering the surveillance of journalists and politicians. As proof, Centellas argued that DNI reports have a distinctive style and format, one which did not match the information and photos leaked to the press. Centellas explained that he was responsible for supervising five separate police intelligence groups, but also stated that intelligence is carried out at even "the smallest police unit." One of the groups under his command, the "Special Group" (GE), Centellas acknowledged does conduct internal surveillance of "organizations and institutions that put internal security at risk." Due to the sensitive nature of the intelligence, Centellas asked that the commission hold a closed session to talk about the information the DNI had on specific groups that were being followed. Centellas also affirmed that he always sent his reports to the commander of the police and Minister of Government.

Commander of USG Funded Unit Testified

15. (U) The former commander of the Police Studies Organization (ODEP) Miguel Angel Rivera, the USG funded unit that Minister of Government Alfredo Rada has blamed for the domestic spying scandal, also testified before the Senate Commission. Rivera stated he had "no idea" who ordered the surveillance of journalists and politicians. Rivera explained that ODEP's mission was focused on anti-narcotics and crimes associated with narcotics trafficking. Rivera testified that he sent his reports to the commander of the Bolivian National Police (BNP). (Note: Rivera did not indicate whether he sent his reports to DNI commander Centellas, but his testimony undermines Minister Rada's accusations that ODEP was a rogue unit that only reported to the U.S. Embassy. End Note).

16. (U) Rivera confirmed that members of ODEP and its predecessor organization, the Police Special Operations Command (COPES), received financing for transport, training and communications equipment, as well as individual bonuses. He asked for a closed session to discuss the details of the bonuses. (Note: The Embassy has gone on record that we provided funding to COPES-ODEP. End Note). Rivera also asked to discuss whether ODEP surveilled Iranian diplomats in a closed session.

Rada Blames USG for Domestic Spying

17. (U) In an interview with Bolivian weekly magazine Pulso, Minister of Government Alfredo Rada once again levied espionage accusations against the USG. In opening the interview the journalist reiterated the basic facts of Fulbright Scholar Alex Van Schaick's accusations that Assistant Regional Security Officer Vincent Cooper asked Van Schaick to provide the Embassy information on Cubans and Venezuelans in Bolivia. Rada time and again tried to link the Van Schaick case with the domestic spying scandal. Rada used Van Schaick's statements -- that the USG pays a unit of the Bolivian National Police (BNP) that is better trained, better armed and loyal to the USG as a basis -- to strongly insinuate that the USG was very likely behind recent domestic spying allegations.

18. (U) In a response to the specific question "Who gave the order to spy (on journalists, politicians, and businessmen)?" Minister Rada attempted to again lay the blame on COPES-ODEP and indirectly on the USG. Rada acknowledged that it was up to prosecutor Tania Alfaro to uncover the facts, but then argued that the Government Ministry "sustains" that COPES-ODEP was responsible for the domestic surveillance

program. Rada throughout the interview asserts that while the government cannot demonstrate that USG ordered the domestic intelligence gathering, the fact that the USG funded COPES-ODEP raises questions.

¶9. (U) Rada reiterated his accusation that COPES-ODEP acted outside the traditional intelligence structure -- the National Intelligence Directorate (DNI). Rada argued that COPES-ODEP's objectives were threefold: to conduct "political intelligence" gathering; to surveil individuals; and, to denigrate the police hierarchy, DNI and the central government. (Note: ODEP Commander Miguel Angel Rivera's testimony before the Senate on February 20, directly contradicts Rada's statements that ODEP tried to undermine the police hierarchy. End Note).

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Rada Rehashes Old Stories
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¶10. (U) When asked why President Morales would urge the armed forces to "safeguard security when referring to the U.S. spy (Van Schaick) case" Rada responded by rehashing a series of events -- fabricated conspiracies -- committed by the Embassy. Rada raised the Dinh affair in which Amcit Donna Dinh attempted to bring into Bolivia 500 target-practice bullets on behalf of our MILGP commander. He once again mentioned the picture of the Ambassador Goldberg with a Colombian delinquent -- which the government has occasionally referred to as Colombian paramilitary -- taken at a trade fair where the Ambassador was photographed with hundreds of people. The third event Rada cited was Van Schaick accusation, and finally he argued our funding of COPES-ODEP represented a fourth problem.

¶11. (C) Comment: The Embassy has provided full explanations of each event to the Bolivian government on numerous occasions. We have explained that the incidents were either simple errors as in the Van Schaick case with no nefarious intent, or baseless innuendo. Rada took our use of the word "errors" and insinuated sarcastically that they represent a pattern, stating "the chain of errors can be converted into external interference in (our) domestic affairs, for this reason the President called on the armed forces." Though Rada refrained from making the direct statement that the USG is engaged in a "conspiracy" against the Morales government -- a claim President Morales, Rada and other ministers have levied with increasing frequency over the past six months -- his use of the term "chain" leaves little doubt what he meant. End Comment.

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Rada Criticizes SDU and Roving Patrol
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¶12. (C) Minister Rada also used the interview to criticize the embassy's use of Surveillance Detection Units (SDU) and Roving Patrol. While never calling the SDU's out by name, Rada mentioned that there are police officers who work for the embassy that conduct intelligence work to prevent attacks on the embassy. Rada argued the unit should only provide protection (security) and not carry-out intelligence gathering. The Minister asserted that the any intelligence on threats to the Embassy should follow what he called "regular" channels; that is the national police should inform the Government Ministry which in turn would inform the Embassy. (Comment: The SDU is made up of Bolivian national police. They prepare all incident reports. Significant incident reports are shared with the Government Ministry via the police who make up the SDU. End Comment).

¶13. (SBU) Rada criticized the Embassy's roving patrol (which he called "Robin Patrol"); police units which we fund to monitor Embassy employees houses and Embassy facilities. Rada asserted that the Bolivian police could provide this security without Embassy coordination; although, he was careful not to reject the USG financing that supports roving patrol.

¶14. (C) Comment: Minister Rada argued that the roving patrol and SDU are an affront to Bolivian sovereignty. However, it is common practice for the Bolivian national police to provide security to private organizations such as banks, stores, and other institutions. The private institutions pay bonuses to their police guards, which is exactly what the Embassy does with our local guard force, roving patrol, and SDU. Rada has yet to publicly call into question the loyalty of police officers who protect private institutions. End Comment.

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Rada Puts ODEP/Senate Through Spin Cycle
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¶15. (C) Rada also attempted to link the ODEP with an unsavory drug dealer because anti-narcotics units were using his confiscated equipment. Instead of focusing on any indiscretion associated with using the equipment, Rada stressed the dealer's long list of crimes. Referring to the Congressional investigation, Rada claimed the Senate can only conduct investigations if a case is not already being investigated by another government body. Since the government is investigating Van Schaick's accusations, which Rada deems associated with the police spying charges, Rada asserted the Senate investigation is illegal and, therefore, he does not plan to participate.

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Comment: Charges Damaging Both to Embassy and Government
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¶16. (C) Comment: Former NDI chief Centellas' charge that the Embassy maintains records on all Bolivians is ridiculous and absurd. Ex-ODEP commander Miguel Angel Rivera's statements keep the heat on Government Minister Rada, who we believe is the person who ordered the domestic spying. As Rada continues to feel cornered, he will continue to attack us and try to paint random events (errors) as part of a canvas of conspiracy. Perhaps more damaging is the potential impact on our Embassy guard force. Rada may ratchet up pressure for guards to "report" on us. End Comment.
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